

ECOSYSTEM STATUS INDICATORS***Benthic Communities and Non-target Fish Species*****Miscellaneous Species – Aleutian Islands**

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A variety of non-target species are seen in the RACE bottom trawl survey in the Aleutian Islands. It is possible that this survey may provide information about possible relative abundance changes in some of these species. Some initial results at summarizing these trends are shown (Figure 83). This survey is not designed to assess these organisms and further detailed examinations of these results are needed to assess whether there are meaningful trends.

Eelpouts and poachers are relatively common in trawl catches but generally occur at very low catch rates so that any apparent increases in abundance may be driven by one or two catches of only a few fish. Starfish and jellyfish are also quite common but exhibit much higher apparent abundance levels. As mentioned earlier, jellyfish may primarily occur higher in the water column and be caught during setting and retrieval of the trawl.

The 2004 survey showed an increase in abundance of eelpouts in all areas except the southern Bering Sea. Eelpout catches in all areas were the highest catches since at least 1991. Starfish catches in 2004 increased relative to 2002 in the western AI and southern BS and decreased in the central and eastern AI. Catches of poachers in 2004 showed a continued decreasing trend in all areas since the high catches in 2000 and 2002. In 2004, jellyfish catch rates increased dramatically and represented the highest or the second highest catches on record in all areas.

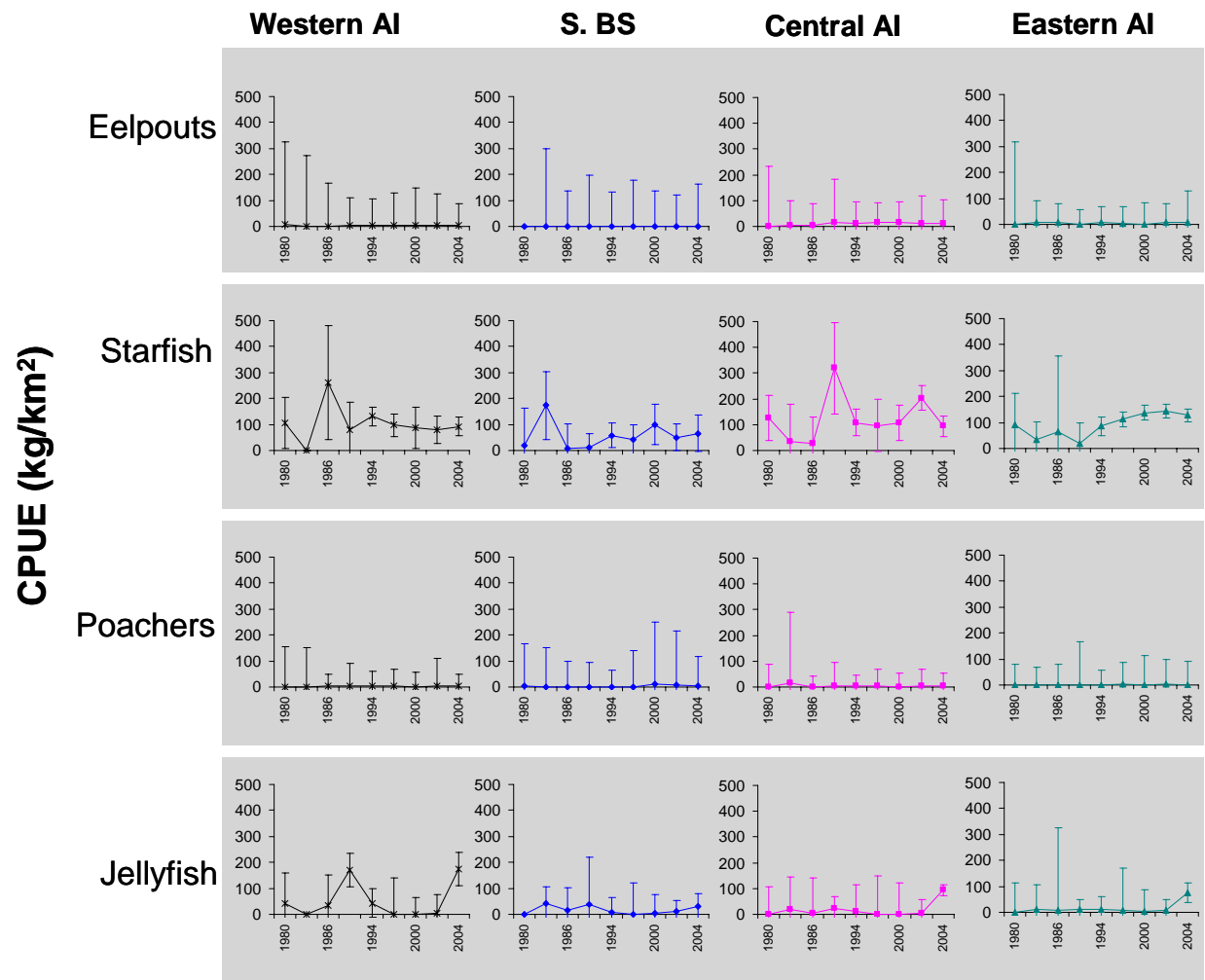


Figure 83. Catch per unit effort of miscellaneous species per unit area in the western Aleutian Islands (AI), southern Bering Sea (BS), central AI, and eastern AI, in bottom trawl surveys conducted between 1980 and 2004. 95% confidence intervals are shown.